

Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)
Frequently Asked Questions

Question: What is a DTA Legal Briefing?

Answer: The DTA Legal Briefing is a meeting between someone at your agency who is authorized to sign legal agreements (generally, your Executive Director or another designee).

Question: Who should attend the DTA Legal Briefing?

Answer: The Authorized Signatory of your agency or his/her designee.

Question: Who should sign DTA Legal Documents?

Answer: The Authorized Signatory of your agency, at the DTA Legal Briefing.

Question: Who on my staff need to be trained for HMIS?

Answer: Anyone who is charged with entry of client data into HMIS. This can be a designated data entry person or intake staff and case managers, as well as supervisors.

Question: Is an HMIS Overview Meeting the same as a Legal Briefing?

Answer: No! The HMIS Overview Meeting is an optional introduction to HMIS hosted by DTA. No forms are signed at this meeting; though, we do encourage attendees to bring their appointment books and sign up for legal briefings and training sessions.

Question: What is an Uploader?

Answer: An Uploader is an agency that has chosen to continue using its database software for homeless information management but who also sends their data to HMIS via the Commonwealth's Secure File and E-mail Delivery Application (SFED). Data must be in the DTA API format which can be obtained by contacting any of the SHORE staff. This data is used to assist in creating regional and statewide unduplicated counts.

Question: How often do I need to Upload information into HMIS?

Answer: Quarterly. Uploading providers will be scheduled.

Question: How do I change the way my bed list functions?

Answer: At the current time, all administrative changes must be done by Bill Silvestri at DTA. Please EMAIL him at william.silvestri@state.ma.us with your specifications and phone number.

Question: How come I can't see all of my programs?

Answer: It is possible that purposefully or through error your security clearance has been limited. If you believe this to be an error, please first check with your agency's technical staff.

Question: Who has to use HMIS?

Answer: All HUD-funded homeless service providers must use a homeless information management system. All DTA-funded providers, in addition to those providers who receive HUD funds through the Balance of State Continuum of Care, must provide data to HMIS, either through uploading or through using the HMIS web-based application (this includes those DTA-distributed Emergency Shelter Grant funds and Shelter Plus Care (S+C) programs). No-one is required to use the HMIS web-based application unless they are otherwise unable to provide DTA with their data in a certified format.

Question: What does it mean when DTA says my data needs to be in a “certified format”?

Answer: For DTA to convert your agency’s electronic data into a format that is readable by HMIS (and thus achieve regional and statewide unduplicated counts), DTA has been working with various software providers to certify that their software and HMIS can “talk” to each other. This process is called a “handshake,” and without it, data cannot be uploaded or moved into HMIS. Specific questions on software certification should be directed to the HMIS deployment team.

Question: Do I have to use the HMIS web-based application? Are there options?

Answer: No. You may become an Uploader if you currently have software that has been certified by DTA as being HMIS-compliant.

Question: How do I download information from HMIS?

Answer: If you have the appropriate user roles and views assigned (i.e., sufficient security rights), you may click the “Request Download” link on the bottom left of your screen. (If no such link exists, you do not have the necessary user view). Select the program for which you wish to download information from the “Program” dropdown list. Select the format (pick CSV to make importing easy) in which you wish to download the information from the “Format” dropdown list. Click “Submit.” Next, click the “View Download” link on the bottom left of your screen and select the appropriate information from the screen. This should download the data to your computer.

Question: How do I run reports?

Answer: If you have the appropriate user roles and views assigned (i.e., sufficient security rights), you may click the “Request Report” link on the bottom left of your screen. (If no such link exists, you do not have the necessary user view). Select the program for which you wish run a report from the “Program” dropdown list. Select the format (pick PDF to make viewing easy) in which you wish to view the report from the “Format” dropdown list. Click “Submit.” Next, click the “View Report” link on the bottom left of your screen and select the appropriate information from the screen. This should allow you to view the report.

Question: Can I use HMIS for a program that is not funded by HUD or DTA?

Answer: Yes! DTA encourages all providers across the Commonwealth to utilize HMIS for as many programs as they have resources and desire. The more homeless services that are accounted for using HMIS, the closer we can all come to a regional, statewide, and eventually nationwide unduplicated count. If HMIS cannot currently be configured to a specific program need, DTA welcomes those comments through both direct contact with the HMIS deployment team and through the statewide Steering Committee, which meets on a regular basis throughout the year.